

strengthening families

THROUGH EARLY CARE & EDUCATION

SMALL BUT SIGNIFICANT CHANGES that strengthen families and prepare children for success



PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Five Protective Factors are the foundation of the Strengthening Families approach:

- Parental Resilience
- Social Connections
- Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development
- Concrete Supports in Times of Need
- Social and Emotional Competence

Research indicates that when these factors are present and robust in a family, the likelihood of child abuse and neglect diminishes.

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Research indicates that five Protective Factors reduce the incidence of child abuse and neglect:

- Parental resilience
- Social connections
- Knowledge of parenting and child development
- Concrete supports in times of need
- Children's social and emotional competence

Across the country, early care and education programs, child welfare departments, and others are using the Strengthening Families approach to build the Protective Factors in families, providing parents with what they need to parent effectively even under stress.

Strengthening Families is an approach to working with children and families in early education centers, child welfare departments, and other settings. Together, we're showing that small but significant changes in everyday work have the power to mobilize extraordinary resources to strengthen families.

BACKGROUND

Starting in 2001, the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) conducted an extensive literature review and held conversations with hundreds of parents, practitioners, and national experts. In 2003, CSSP researched exemplary early care and education programs across the country. Based on this work, for the first time, the link between early childhood programs and reducing abuse and neglect was documented. This research was used to create a logic model that described the Strengthening Families approach, centering on the Protective Factors. Over three years, seven states piloted Strengthening Families Through Early Care and Education. Today, at least 36 states have Strengthening Families activities, and numerous states and national organizations are part of the Strengthening Families National Network (see page four).

The Protective Factors

Five Protective Factors are the foundation of the Strengthening Families approach. CSSP's research supports the common-sense notion that the likelihood of child abuse and neglect diminishes when these Protective Factors are present and robust in a family:

The Strengthening Families approach and the Protective Factors are informed by extensive, rigorous research.

1. **Parental Resilience:** The ability to cope with and bounce back from all types of challenges
2. **Social Connections:** Friends, family members, neighbors, and other members of a community who provide emotional support and concrete assistance to parents
3. **Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development:** Accurate information about raising young children, appropriate expectations for their behavior, and knowledge of alternative discipline techniques
4. **Concrete Supports in Times of Need:** Financial security to cover day-to-day expenses and unexpected costs; formal supports like TANF, Medicaid, and job training; and informal support from social networks
5. **Children's Social and Emotional Competence:** A child's ability to interact positively with others and communicate his or her emotions effectively

The Advantages

The Strengthening Families approach is taking hold nationwide for many reasons, including:

- The Protective Factors have been demonstrated to work and are informed by extensive, rigorous research.
- Activities that build the Protective Factors can be built into programs and systems that already exist in every state, such as early childhood education and child welfare, at little cost.
- Strengthening Families has widespread support from social science researchers, state child welfare officials, early childhood practitioners, and policy experts.
- Early childhood educators want to strengthen families: a National Association for the Education of Young Children survey shows that 97% want to do more to prevent maltreatment.

STRENGTHENING FAMILIES IN EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION PROGRAMS

More than 750 early care and education programs nationwide are using the Strengthening Families approach to build Protective Factors in all families. At these centers, parents feel valued, families are supported, and social connections keep families strong. Staff have the tools, strategies, and support they need to build caring, trusting relationships with parents. They are trained to recognize signs of

Nationwide, 97% of early childhood teachers and administrators want to do more to prevent child maltreatment.

stress that might precede abuse or neglect, and they know how to offer appropriate support and information in a positive way.

As early care and education centers make small, affordable changes to strengthen families and prevent child maltreatment, Strengthening Families provides invaluable support and guidance through an **on-line electronic library** providing:

- A **Strengthening Families Guidebook**, full of strategies for building the Protective Factors and descriptions of exemplary programs nationwide
- A **Strengthening Families Self-Assessment, Staff Tool, and Parent Tool** to help plan and continually assess your center's progress
- A **Training Marketplace** describing a range of professional development opportunities tailored to your center's needs
- **Discussion and Feedback Forums** putting early childhood educators in touch with others doing Strengthening Families work
- And **hundreds of other tools** developed by early care and education centers that are implementing Strengthening Families

Through Strengthening Families, early childhood programs can get support every step of the way, from laying the groundwork to program assessment to implementing program changes.

IMPLEMENTING STRENGTHENING FAMILIES IN YOUR STATE

In more than half of all states, policymakers are implementing Strengthening Families in order to strengthen families and prevent abuse and neglect. A statewide Strengthening Families initiative allows early care and education centers to work together throughout communities, regions, and states to strengthen families and prevent child abuse and neglect.

State Strengthening Families initiatives are building an infrastructure for the widespread adoption of the Strengthening Families approach, not just in early care and education, but in child welfare and other systems. While approaches differ from state to state, in each case there is a commitment to increasing the reach so that more professionals can frame their work with families using the Protective Factors.

JOIN THE NETWORK

As a member of the Strengthening Families National Network, you and your colleagues will:

- Be part of an on-line community of peers dedicated to strengthening families
- Be able to exchange feedback on draft tools and materials with others nationwide
- Access data from across your state collected through the Strengthening Families Self-Assessment
- Participate in Strengthening Families pilot programs
- Take part in meetings and symposia with others who can inform your work
- Be a leader in Strengthening Families nationwide

And much more! Learn more at:
www.strengtheningfamilies.net

State leaders with experience in Strengthening Families have developed an array of tools that are useful in building the Protective Factors in early care and education and other systems. State leaders can gather information from an **on-line electronic library** and training marketplace that will help them:

- Institute policies that build families' Protective Factors
- Create effective leadership teams and sustain involvement of early childhood and child welfare staff and parents
- Create a professional development framework around the Protective Factors
- Sustain change through evaluation and assessment

STRENGTHENING FAMILIES NATIONAL NETWORK

Launched in 2008, the Strengthening Families National Network gives members a forum for sharing knowledge and tools, learning together within and across states, and helping each other transform systems that support children and families. Membership in the network is free, renewable annually, and open to all states, territories, and tribes working to implement Strengthening Families. See the sidebar at left for an overview of benefits.

There are two levels of membership in the Strengthening Families National Network:

1. **Partners** have implemented deep, broad-based Strengthening Families approaches in multiple systems and take a leadership role in the Network.
2. **Affiliates** are strongly committed to Strengthening Families and are carrying out strategies that could lead to becoming a Partner.

One application per state, territory, or tribe is accepted, after which an unlimited number of people from the state, territory, or tribe can participate. National organizations are welcome to join as Affiliates.

For more information about the Strengthening Families approach or to join the Strengthening Families National Network, visit:

www.strengtheningfamilies.net

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